

# Sleep: Helping Your Children—and Yourself—Sleep Well

Pregnancy & Parenting Categories

## Overview

- Children of all ages need plenty of sleep to grow and develop. School-age children may have trouble learning and developing socially if they don't get enough sleep.
- Children's sleep problems can cause stress for parents, who may worry about their children. Parents also may be awake much of the night trying to get a child back to sleep. Their own lack of sleep can affect parents' focus at work or in school.
- Health problems can cause sleep trouble in children. Examples of these conditions include [asthma](#), [ADHD](#), autism, [obstructive sleep apnea](#), and Down syndrome. Talk to your child's doctor if your child often has trouble getting to sleep or staying asleep.
- Parents can help their children sleep well by having a comforting bedtime routine and consistent bedtimes.
- Parents can help themselves sleep well by learning about sleep routines and about how to reduce stress and relax.

## How can you help your children and yourself sleep well?

### Help your baby sleep well

- At night, set up a soothing routine. Give your baby a bath, sing lullabies, read a book, or tell a story.
- When your baby is getting sleepy, put your baby in his or her crib in a quiet, darkened room. This will help your baby learn to go to sleep in his or her crib.
- Try to feed your hungry newborn when he or she starts to wake up and is still calm. Hungry cries often start with a whimper and become louder and longer. If you respond before your newborn gets upset, he or she will feed and go back to sleep easier.
- Periods of murmuring and restlessness every 50 to 60 minutes are a normal part of a baby sleep cycle. The restlessness usually lasts a few minutes. If you leave your baby alone, he or she will likely fall back to sleep.
- Settle your baby down to sleep as quickly as possible if he or she is not acting hungry during a nighttime feeding.
- If your baby wakes up and doesn't settle down, check to see if he or she is hungry or needs a diaper change. Feed or change your baby quietly. Keep the light low. Don't play with or sing to your baby. Put him or her back in the crib as soon as you can.
- Try to stay calm. Young children are very sensitive to a parent's feelings of frustration.
- Be consistent. If you change your plan for how to handle nighttime crying, make sure that you and your partner agree on it before you go to bed.

### Help your child sleep well

- Set up a bedtime routine to help your child get ready for bed and sleep. For example, read together, cuddle, and listen to soft music for 15 to 30 minutes before you turn out the lights. Do things in the same order each night so your child knows what to expect.

- Keep your child's bedroom quiet, dark or dimly lit, and cool. Keep TVs and computers out of your child's room.
- Limit activities that stimulate your child, such as playing and watching TV, in the hours closer to bedtime.
- If your child wakes up and calls for you in the middle of the night, make your response the same each time. Offer quick comfort, but then leave the room.
- Help prevent nightmares by controlling what your child watches on TV.
- Have your child take medicines exactly as prescribed. Call your doctor if your child has any problems with his or her medicine.
- Do not try to wake your child during a night terror. Instead, reassure and hold your child to prevent injury.
- If your child sleepwalks, keep the windows locked during sleep time. Block doorways and stairwells to prevent your child from wandering or falling during the night. Try an adjustable baby gate to block these areas.
- If your child is overweight, work with your child to set goals for managing his or her weight. Being overweight can cause sleep problems or make them worse.

### Help your teen sleep well

- Talk to your teen about why it's important to go to bed at the same time every night and wake up at the same time every morning.
- If your teen is going to bed at a very late hour, teach him or her how to change bedtime a little at a time. Suggest that your teen go to bed 15 minutes earlier each night until the best bedtime is reached.
- Have your teen keep his or her bedroom quiet, dark, and cool at bedtime. It's best to remove the TV, computer, phone, and video games from your teen's room.
- Encourage your teen to manage his or her homework load. This can prevent the need to study all night before a test or stay up late to do homework.
- If a teen has trouble waking up in the morning, ask what you can do to help.
  - Offer to wake him or her.
  - Offer to check to make sure your teen got up when the alarm went off.
  - Offer to turn on a bright light in the room when it's time to get up.
- Teach your teen to avoid caffeine (found in soda, energy drinks, coffee, tea, and chocolate) after 3 p.m. Health Canada recommends that children and teens not drink caffeinated energy drinks.<sup>1</sup>
- If your teen is overweight, work with your teen to set goals for managing his or her weight. Being overweight can be linked with sleep problems.

### Help yourself sleep well

- Avoid or limit caffeine and nicotine, especially in the hours before bedtime. Both can keep you awake.
- Don't drink alcohol before bedtime. Alcohol can cause you to wake up more often during the night.
- Don't take medicine that may keep you awake, or make you feel hyper or energized, right before bed. Your doctor can tell you if your medicine may do this and if you can take it earlier in the day.
- Use the evening hours for settling down. Avoid watching TV and using the computer or phone if they keep you from getting to sleep.
- Keep your bedroom quiet, dark, and cool. Try using a sleep mask to help you sleep.
- Take a warm bath before bed.
- Make your own sleep routine. Try to have the same bedtime and wake-up time each day.



Manage stress. The stress and worry that come with having a child who isn't sleeping well may be causing you sleep problems too. But there are steps you can take to manage that stress and sleep better.

[Stress Management: Breathing Exercises for Relaxation](#)

[Stress Management: Doing Guided Imagery to Relax](#)

[Stress Management: Doing Meditation](#)

[Stress Management: Doing Progressive Muscle Relaxation](#)

[Stress Management: Relaxing Your Mind and Body](#)

## References

### Citations

1. Health Canada (2012). Category-specific guidance for temporary marketing authorization: Caffeinated energy drinks. Available online: <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/legislation/guide-ld/guidance-caf-drink-boiss-tma-amt-eng.php>.



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